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## ABSTRACT

Communication theory has ignored a major component of the communicative process: the relationship which defines the sort of message being sent and how the message is to be interpreted. This relationship, not the message, is crucial to the development of personal meaning for the information being exchanged. In teaching and in all human relationships, the most positive behavior displays qualities of warmth, empathy, and genuineness. Messages which reveal whether these qualities are present or absent are vital if learning and other good behavior is to take place. They are more important than the technology and audiovisual aids which educators have been most concerned with. What distinguishes a good helper, teacher, or communicator from a poor one? It is five beliefs, which determine the kinds of relationship that develop between people. These beliefs are: 1) What do you believe is important?; 2) What do you believe people are like?; 3) What do you believe about yourself?; 4) What do you believe are your purposes?; and 5) What do you believe about your methods? (JK)

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COMMUNICATION: A HELPING RELATIONSHIP\*

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\*Paper presented during 1972 Annual Conference, International  
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A number of issues have stimulated this paper. (A) What's happening in Communication?; (B) What are the relationships among communication, education and learning?; and (C) How might we view the Communication discipline as a Helping Profession?

First let's take a look at four statements which I believe limit severely the development of a Communication discipline.

- (1) Communication research and theory appear to be concerned with human interaction situations which provide rewards for sources. Little concern is given to rewards for the other unless it is what sources think is best for receivers.
- (2) Communication is overly concerned with content message variables rather than process and/or relationship variables or systems.
- (3) Communication has placed an overemphasis upon "receivers" to the point of saying "the most important element of communication is the receiver." However, "being concerned with the receiver" seems to be important only if it helps the source obtain rewards for himself.
- (4) Process or relationship variables seem to be of minor concern as little attention has been given to what kind of relationship develops or exists between a source and a receiver regardless of the goals of the interaction or the topic of conversation.

I do not wish to take time in this paper to substantiate the above four statements. I do not pretend to be criticizing

the communication fields for being concerned with those issues. However, I am suggesting that if that is all Communicologists become concerned with, then one, we are missing out on one of the most significant aspects of human interaction; two, the development of theoretical bases for our field will continue to remain obscure; and finally, we will continue to provide little assistance to help resolve social and/or human concerns in our society. Thus an alternative.

Three statements seem very important in light of the theme for this convention entitled "New Think: Communication and Learning."

- (1) Many of the problems in our society are related to the ways in which human beings perceive, communicate with, relate to and behave toward each other. As Communicologists, this statement would appear to be a given as well as a reason for the Communication profession. Yet, as we review education in general, from elementary through graduate school, we see a less than maximal impact in terms of solving these problems.
- (2) Learning might well be conceived as a function of: (a) information transmitted, and (b) the development or discovery of personal meaning for that information. The major emphasis in education in general, as well as in the communication fields, has been a concern for how to get more information, more efficiently, to others. Little concern has developed with facilitating the discovery of personal meaning for that

information. It seems axiomatic that any information will affect a person's behavior only to the degree to which he has discovered the personal meaning of that information for him.

(3) Most educators and/or Communicologists would likely agree with the following statements: "The most education can do is provide a context in which students can discover for themselves ways of thinking about and understanding how they relate to others and the environment in which they exist. In practice, however, a great deal of diversity exists."

In light of the above three propositions concerning education, learning, and communication, Weinstein and Fantini (1970) have stated that:

"The discrepancy between the behavior of individuals in society and what they have learned, or at least what the schools purport to teach, suggests the need for examination of education's chosen channel for changing or affecting behavior. Traditionally, this channel has been subject matter per se--the courses offered, the curriculum taught, the academic disciplines... Rarely is curriculum designed to help the student deal in personal problems of human conduct." (p. 17)

Weinstein and Fantini continue: we have assumed that "by mastering cognitive content, the individual learns to behave appropriately as a citizen in an open society." (1970, p. 31)

What seems to have taken place in Education and in the discipline of Communication, is that we have ignored a large aspect or component of the communicative process--the relationship level which defines what sort of message is being sent and how the message is to be taken or interpreted, and, therefore, ultimately to the relationship between the communicators.

We have placed our eggs in the "content" or "message" basket and discovering effects of the message without knowledge of, or concern for, the relationship which has been defined by the communicators. I contend that it is the "relationship" level or component of an interactional system which is essential to the development of personal meaning for the information exchanged.

Beels and Ferber (1969) have listed three axioms of relevance here:

- (1) All behavior is communicative. It is impossible to not communicate since even the refusal to send or receive messages is a comment on the relationship between people who are in contact.
- (2) Messages have "report" and "command" functions. Thus, "It's raining" is a report, but depending on the context, inflection and relationship of speaker to hearer, it may also be a command to remember an umbrella.
- (3) Command messages define relationships. The command aspect of communication is the troublesome part because it is the medium through which relationships are shaped, and in this process ambiguity, misunderstanding and duplicity are possible. (p. 297)

In viewing the significance of relationships in communication, another axiom offered by Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1967) is that any communication implies a commitment and thereby defines the relationship. This is another way of saying that communication not only conveys information but that at the

same time, it imposes behavior. This "command" function of communication as stated by the authors above refers to what sort of a message it is to be taken as, and therefore, ultimately, to the relationship between the communicators. All such relationship statements are about one or several of the following assertions: This is how I see myself; this is how I see you; this is how I see you see me; and so forth in theoretically infinite regress. Thus, for instance, the messages "It is important to release the clutch gradually and smoothly," and "Just let the clutch go, it will ruin the transmission in no time," have approximately the same information content, but they obviously define very different relationships.

To avoid any misunderstanding about the foregoing, we want to make it clear that relationships are only rarely defined deliberately or with full awareness. In fact, it seems that the more spontaneous and "healthy" a relationship, the more the relationship aspect of communication recedes into the background. Conversely, "sick" relationships (such as one person trying to impress another) are characterized by constant struggles about the nature of the relationship with the content aspect of communication becoming less and less important.

Watzlawick, et. al., (1967) view the command function of communication in the following way:

As we can see, the relationship aspect of the communication being a communication about a communication is identical with the concept of meta-communication. The ability to meta-communicate appropriately is not only the conditio sine qua non of successful communication, but is intimately linked with the enormous problem of awareness of self and others. (p. 53)

Given, then, that the "relationship" function of communication is inherent in all human interactions, and is theoretically significant in terms of behavioral change or affect, let us look at the function of teacher-student relationships. The following is taken from Pancrazio (1972).

Amidon and Hunter (1966) raised the following questions:

"Why do researchers engaged in classroom observation find that teachers are so controlling, restrictive, and inhibiting? Why is it that teachers tend to do most of the talking (about 70 percent in the average classroom, according to Flanders)?

These behaviors appear to emphasize that often teacher behavior is controlling, inhibiting, and tending to be negative, rather than positive.

It is important that safe, nonthreatening relationships be offered to students. These relationships must be marked by empathy, warmth, and genuineness. As Hyman (1968) stated concerning his study of the description of concepts of the ideal teacher-student relationship, "...the ideal therapist-patient relationship and the ideal teacher-student relationship are but special cases of an ideal person-person relationship." His findings emphasized "the importance of good communication, of eliminating to some degree the superior-subordinate relations, and of responding warmly to the students."

Concerning the teacher as a helper or as a facilitator, it appears that such qualities as warmth, empathy,

and genuineness are important in the atmosphere of the classroom, for the best student achievement. A number of studies reported by Truax and Carkhuff (1967) focus upon the teacher in the classroom. For example, Truax and Tatum (1968) found that the degree of warmth and empathy of the teacher was related to positive changes in both the performance and social adjustment of pre-school children. Aspy (1968) found that third-grade teachers who were warm, empathic, and genuine were "able to produce greater behavior change in terms of reading achievement than those less warm, empathic, and genuine." Apparently, regardless of the goal of the interaction, the core dimensions are an important part of effectiveness.

In any human process, whether teaching, parent-child relationships, or counseling, the recipient of the conditions of empathy, warmth, and genuineness appears to gain beyond achieving particular goals such as academic achievement. When a person receives empathy, warmth, and genuineness, he (the recipient) becomes more empathic, warm, and genuine. Providing the conditions of a good relationship, as a teacher or as a counselor, would not only assist students in achieving goals, but also in assisting students to become more therapeutic toward others.

It appears, then, that one approach toward preparing psychological educators is training in the core dimensions. Not only does there appear to be a rela-

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tionship between the dimensions and the goals of teaching, but also those who receive the conditions become more therapeutic in their relationships with others. (End of quotation from Pancrazio.)

Rogers (1969) has emphasized these core dimensions by stating that it is the relationship which facilitates significant learning; skills, techniques, and materials are or can be important resources. The relationship variables included by Rogers are: (1) realness or genuineness, (2) prizing, accepting, trusting, caring for (nonpossessively) the learner, and (3) empathic understanding.

A similar view is taken by Truax and Carkhuff (1967). They point out that "the person...who is able to communicate warmth, genuineness, and accurate empathy is more effective in interpersonal relationships no matter what the goal of the interaction..."

What I have tried to communicate to this point is that there is a significant correlation among an educational environment, interpersonal communication and something we call learning on the part of the recipient, as well as the facilitator. I have also indirectly implied that the Communicologist, whether he is teaching, consulting, preaching or simply involved in everyday interpersonal interaction with the man on the street or with a professional colleague, must be concerned with the nature and function of relationships in which he is involved. He must be aware that the changes which he is trying to obtain

in the other or in himself, involve what Art Combs and others have labeled a "helping profession." He must be aware that if he is to maximize his potential in society he must first help create in himself and others what Humanistic Psychologists have called the "self-actualized" person.

Art Combs (1965) and his colleagues have for the past ten years been concerned with the question "What makes a good helper?" Their research consisted first of reviewing past literature for some indication of what makes a good helper, whether he be teacher, counselor, preacher, nurse, social welfare worker, or simply a concerned human. Combs (1965, p. 4) summarizes this research by saying "It is commonplace but not very flattering to this commentator, to deplore the fact that more than a half century of research effort has not yielded meaningful, measurable criteria around which the majority of the nation's educators can rally."

Combs and others' research in the last decade (reported in Combs, The Professional Education of the Teacher, 1965) have come up with five (5) basic beliefs which have consistently distinguished between "good" and "poor" helpers. The belief criteria are based upon what Combs calls the Perceptual Psychologists, the Third Force in Psychology, or simply the Third Psychology. It is concerned with how one can facilitate and assist learning rather than to control and direct it. These principles are:

(1) Perceptual Basis of Behavior. All behavior of a person is the direct result of his field of perceptions at the moment of his behaving. Specifically, his behavior at any in-

stant is the result of: (1) how he sees himself, (2) how he sees the situations in which he is involved, and (3) the inter-relations of these two.

From this principle we see that the failure to understand how things seem to other people is the most persistent source of difficulties in human relationships. Perceptual Psychology tells us that behavior is only a symptom, the surface manifestation of what is going on within the individual. If we can change one's beliefs, he will change his behavior. To attack behavior is to deal with the symptoms rather than the causes.

(2) The Self-Concept and Behavior. The organization of ways of seeing self is called "self-concept." It is the most important single influence affecting an individual's behavior. The self-concept is not something we are born with. It is what we learn as a consequence of our experience with those who surround us in the process of our growing up.

(3) The Basic Need for Personal Adequacy. Man continually strives for self-fulfillment--to be "enough." Personal adequacy is the striving for self-fulfillment and self-enhancement. Everyone is always motivated to be and become as adequate as he can in the situations as he sees them. This drive is innate and thus changes the whole structure of the educational process. The role of teacher is thus of facilitator, encourager, helper, assister, colleague, and friend of his students. His goal is not to "motivate" the student. The student is already motivated. The teacher-communicator can only assist in arranging an environment so that students can discover for them-

selves ways of thinking about and understanding how they relate to others and their environment in order that information may become personally meaningful to them. Part of that environment is ourselves and our attempts at communicating empathy, warmth and genuineness.

The teacher's or communicator's willingness and ability to enter into relationships with students, colleagues and subject matter is crucial to effective teaching. This calls for openness--"making one's self visible"--to disclose himself and permit others to really see him, what he thinks, believes, and stands for. This personal interaction is basic to communication.

#### WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

If we can assume from the previous remarks that there is much more to human interaction than "transmitting" content-oriented messages; that the messages which reveal relationships among the individuals in communication is vital in terms of learning, then what is it that is significant criteria in the development of the core dimensions of relationship, i.e., warmth, empathy, and genuineness?

In response to my question to a nine-year-old boy, "What is communication?", the nine-year-old replied after some thought, "Well, it's really talking to your friend." If we can grasp what that statement might mean to a child, perhaps we can better understand the "belief system" which Combs (1965) and his colleagues are proposing as significant criteria distinguishing good and poor helpers, whether they be teachers, social workers, nurses or ministers.

On page two (2) of this paper, I listed three statements which seem significant for this convention. One of these needs repeating. Learning is a function of: (1) information transmitted, and (2) the discovery of personal meaning for that information. If we look at American education over the past years, we see a tremendous interest in getting more information, more effectively, to the learner. We have developed team teaching, overhead projectors, programmed texts, Educational TV, movies, etc. But if we look at learning from the learner's point of view, we find that most of us don't misbehave because of a lack of information. In fact, we have too much. We misbehave because the information we already have has not been made personally meaningful.

Similarly, dropouts don't drop out because of a lack of information, but because of a lack of personally meaningful information. And teachers don't fail because of a lack of information, but because of a lack of ability in assisting the learner in discovering a personal meaning for information.

Thus, successful learning or effective communication involves helping others discover personal meaning for information. And helping others to find personal meaning for information involves communication or the development of "healthy" relationships between two participants.

So what makes a good helper, a good communicator, a good teacher, a good facilitator? What are the subtle relationships between people which facilitate learning, that makes a good teacher, principal, therapist, or communicator? Combs (1965) and his colleagues suggest that the good HELPER is not

good because of his knowledge or because of his methods.

What does distinguish the good ones from the poor ones is the question of HUMAN BELIEFS. It is a question of how one learns to use self in an interaction. Combs and his co-workers suggest five (5) human beliefs which seem critical in distinguishing good and poor teachers.

It is these five beliefs which I view as the "guts" of communication. These beliefs determine the kinds of relationships that develop between participants in an interaction system. They determine for the recipient of a message how he should interpret the incoming message, and, more importantly, whether or not the "source" is genuine, honest and is interested in the receiver as a person and thus the kinds of effects the message may have upon him.

The five beliefs proposed by Combs and others are:

- (1) What do you believe is important?
- (2) What do you believe people are like?
- (3) What do you believe about yourself?
- (4) What do you believe are your purposes?
- (5) What do you believe about methods you use?

Let us look at these beliefs one at a time to determine their significance in Communication-Education-Learning systems. Ideas are freely taken from a speech given by Art Combs in the State of Washington, 1968. All of the following beliefs are supported by Combs and others as representing significant criteria in distinguishing good helpers from poor helpers.

1--What do you believe is important?

A story which Combs relates as true will shed some light on this criteria. A small boy, upon going to school on the third day of the year, was sobbing in the hall. It seems that he didn't know his teacher's name and she wore a wig that day, and he didn't recognize her. The principal of this school took Johnny by the hand and after some time found Johnny's room. They opened the door and Johnny's teacher said: "Why, Johnny, where have you been? We've missed you so." Johnny ran to his teacher, she hugged him, patted him on the "fanny," and he ran to his seat.

This teacher knew what was important. Little boys were important. But what if Johnny's teacher thought principals were important. She might have responded: "Why, Mr. Johnson, please come in. We were wondering when you would visit our class. Bla, bla, bla." The teacher completely ignored Johnny.

Or what if Johnny's teacher thought discipline was important. She then might have said: "Johnny, you are late. Now you know when you are late, you must go and get a tardy slip. Bla, bla, bla." Or what if lessons were important? Or control and order in the classroom? You get the picture? Johnny's teacher knew what was important. Little boys were important. What you believe is important considerably affects how you behave.

Combs and others found that taking the other person's point of view--sensitivity, empathy--clearly distinguished between good and poor teachers. Failure to look at a problem from the other's vantage point is the most important process

that produces failure in communication breakdown.

The principle, then, is that good teachers--helpers--are concerned about people. Poor teachers are concerned about problems, things, rules, grades, etc.

2-- What do you believe people are like?

Our beliefs about people determine how we behave toward them. And what we believe about people is revealed in spite of ourselves--in our methods, in our language, in our behavior. The old Indian adage is relevant. "What you do speaks so loudly I can't hear what you are saying." Good helpers believe people are able, dependable, friendly, trustworthy, responsible. Poor helpers were found to believe just the opposite about people.

The Summerhill program in England represents a belief by its founder, Neil, that Children are "enough." He dared to go all the way with children, and what we all thought would go wrong, regarding sexual behavior, for instance, didn't happen. There hasn't been a single pregnancy in over forty years.

If we believe people are able, are responsible, then, indeed, they can solve their own problems. All we can effectively do is help provide an environment which is nonthreatening where-in one can explore his alternatives and thus resolve his own problems.

Thus, we see that good helpers go all the way with people. Poor helpers do not.

## 3--What do you believe about yourself?

A self-actualized person sees himself in positive ways--he sees himself as enough. Feeling positive and good about self gives one confidence. Confidence gives assurance, and assurance results in others responding to you effectively.

Good helpers, teachers, communicators are willing to reveal themselves to others. They can accept themselves and thus can accept others for what they are. If one can't accept himself, neither can he accept others. Thus, for effective communication one must reveal himself to others, for only by revealing yourself can another form a relationship with you. Poor teachers tend to conceal themselves.

How we feel about ourselves has a significant effect upon others. And how we feel about ourselves and others is revealed in the language we use to express our feelings, ideas, and values. Listen to yourself talk, and you will see the degree to which you are willing to share yourself with others.

Good helpers reveal and share.

Poor helpers conceal and hide.

We reveal ourselves in spite of ourselves.

## 4--What do you believe are your purposes?

All behavior is based upon purposes. You would rather do this than that. Society and institutions have purposes. And we have professional purposes. Research tells us that if your purpose is to help people solve problems, you won't be a very good helper. However, if your purpose is to help people grow, then this can be done without solving problems.

The good teacher's purposes are freeing rather than restricting or controlling. This purpose demands that teachers get in the act with people--to share. Remember your language betrays your purpose, your belief. Do you say: "How can I make them...?" "How can I get them to...?" or "If I could just...." A good helper says the following: "How can I assist; aid; help; arrange matters so...?"

Counseling sessions seem to be getting longer and longer of late. One reason seems to be that psychiatrists have stopped trying to solve problems and have started to help people grow. So what you believe is your purpose determines to a large extent how you behave toward and relate to others.

#### 5--What do you believe about methods you use?

Research tells us that no one method is better than another--but use the method that fits you, that is authentic. Our methods are like clothes we wear. You might not look good in mine, nor I in yours. A healthy relationship can develop only if you let the other know who you are by being genuine. And your method suggests your relationship with others.

Good teachers use methods that are authentic and reveal themselves to others; poor ones do not.

These five beliefs, as described above, are basic to forming "healthy" and "positive" relationships. They are basic to initiating a relationship wherein both parties can feel good about themselves, and feel self-confident. With these "good helper" beliefs, a communication relationship can take place whereby personal growth, self-actualization, and effective learning are the consequence.

Back on page two, I made three statements that significantly deal with basic concerns of communication, education, and learning. With the five beliefs stated above, it appears that we as communicators might maximize our potential in helping people grow and thus resolve many of the problems that trouble our society, institutions, and individual lives.

Combs and others (1965) discuss a growing body of research that supports these five beliefs as criteria distinguishing good from poor helpers. They report results which shed light on how to develop these beliefs in people and how they facilitate classroom learning. Only the basic ideas are presented here which apply to present-day helping professions.

But what about the future? How might these beliefs be relevant to the person of tomorrow?

#### The Person of Tomorrow

As I view the future as forecasted by numerous writers, it seems that the Belief Systems which I have outlined above will play an even more significant role in maintaining some sense of balance for the individual, and yet at the same time be effective in facilitating one's ability to actively cope with his environment.

Carl Rogers has stated some of the following characteristics of the future person in an address given at the Esalen Institute. The man of tomorrow will be a process person who has no use for sham, facade, or pretense. He hates phoniness and values authenticity. He wants organizations to be fluid, human and changing. He sees teaching as a vastly overrated function

but values facilitative learning which involves feelings and meanings in the here-and-now.

The future person considers the pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake as useless. He is deeply concerned with living in moral and ethical ways--but changing ways. Saying and doing must match. Future man recognizes that there will exist only temporary relationships, and, thus, they must be established quickly through intimate, communicative bonds. But just as rapidly, they must be severed.

The future person distrusts marriage as an institution; it must be a growing, dynamic relationship. He is willing to search without finding answers, realizing his only certainty is the uncertainty of things. He is open and sensitive to others and reality. He is highly aware of self and communicates with self freely. He can express his feelings--love, hate, anger, joy. He is vitally alive. He is spontaneous and willing to risk.

Future man is optimistic--everything is possible. He likes to be "turned on." He will obey laws he thinks are good and disobey others, but is willing to take the consequences. He is active and wants change. He trusts his own experiences, but distrusts authority. He has little use for material things and material rewards. He is highly controversial because of his challenge to our highly-held values, traditions and attitudes. Experience is his guideline.

This is a forecast of future man. Future man is one who will demand spontaneity, warmth, empathy, and genuineness; he will demand authenticity.

If we are concerned about today's problems in society, education, and individual growth, then we cannot ignore the fact that our personal belief systems will play a significant and active part in the present and future life of mankind.

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